

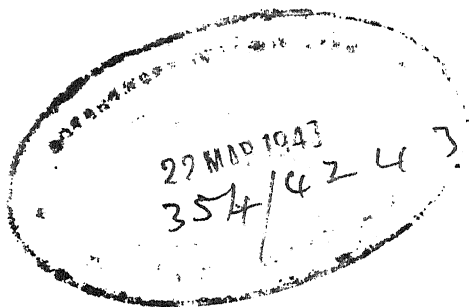
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History of Ancient India

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By

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TO
THE SWEET
AND
EVER-CHERISHED MEMORY
OF
MY DEARLY BELOVED WIFE
HEMAVATĪ DEVĪ

*"A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright,
With something of angelic light."*

PREFACE

The object of this volume is to provide within a moderate compass a compendious account of the history, institutions, and culture of ancient India from the dim ages of antiquity to the establishment of Moslem rule. It has not been planned to meet the needs of any particular class of readers. Its primary purpose is to serve alike students, scholars, and all others, interested in the study of ancient Indian history, as a book of ready use and reference. How far I have succeeded in striking a happy balance in my narrative to suit the requirements and tastes of each one of these groups that approach history from widely divergent angles, it is for competent critics to judge. But suffice it to say here that in the pages which follow every attempt has been made to avoid presenting a mass of the dry bones of historical fact or over-burdening the account with intricate discussions on knotty problems of history, on the one hand, and giving a mere general and readable survey of India's long and fascinating past, on the other. I have endeavoured to tap and utilise properly the available sources of information, literary, epigraphic, and numismatic, and also to embody and set forth in a consistent manner the results of up-to-date researches on different topics and epochs. All the materials have been patiently sifted and critically examined with the sole desire to arrive at historical truth.

For he is neither a propagandist of ideas nor a chronicler of the exploits of ambitious dynasts of old. He has, as far as possible, eliminate the subjective element and hold up the mirror of his mind to reflect the past without the least distortion or colouring. He cannot afford to be dogmatic in his statements, especially in ancient Indian history, where gaps still yawn and evidence is not only vague, uncertain, and fragmentary, but also at times conflicting or contradictory. This being the nature of the data at our disposal, the historicity of some kings is indeed a matter of doubt and controversy at this distance in time. Such scepticism, however, appears natural, when we realise that our ancient predecessors as well had a fair share of it. We may aptly recall here the words of the *Purāṇa*,¹ which run to this effect: "I have given no history. The existence of these kings will in the future become a matter of debate and doubt as the verities of Rāma and other august kings has become a matter of doubt and speculation. Emperors have become mere legends in the current of time—the Emperor has thought and think "India is mine." Fie on the Empire of Emperor Rāghava."

The idea of the work originated a few years ago, but, for reasons which need not be detailed, it could not materialise earlier. Even now I have not been able to write a chapter on Greater India, though on the general features of our history. I have, however, to add both in the second edition what was left out. I have not also been able to give the illustrations owing to the forbidding prices of the materials.

them where necessary. I owe special obligation to my esteemed friend, Prof. B. L. Sahni, who very kindly went through the proofs at much personal inconvenience, and ungrudgingly gave me the benefit of his scholarship and experience. To my valued colleague, Dr. A. S. Altekar, I am grateful for going through the MS. and making some useful suggestions. Lastly, my thanks are also due to Mr. Ram Sumer for helping me in the preparation of the Index.

The system of transliteration adopted in the text is the one followed in my earlier work, 'The History of Kanauj.' To illustrate, we may mention: Bāṇa, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, Śaśigupta, Soma, Candra, Coḷa, Aṅga, Rīgveda, etc. But, as a rule, I have not used diacritical marks in the case of modern place-names and other popular forms.

In conclusion, I crave the readers' indulgence for any blemishes and errors of omission and commission, which may still be discovered by the discerning eye, although no pains have been spared to make the account lucid, accurate, concise, and comprehensive. The subject dealt with here is vast and complicated, and while writing I was often reminded of the well-known lines of Kālidāsa:

क्व सूर्यप्रभवो वंशः क्व चाल्पविषया मतिः

तितीर्षुर्दुस्तरं मोहादुडुपेनास्मि सागरम् ॥

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Ep. Ind.—*Epigraphia Indica*.
S. I. I.—*South Indian Inscriptions*.
C. I. I.—*Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Volumes I, II & III.
R. E.—*Rock Edict of Aśoka*.
M. R. E.—*Minor Rock Edict of Aśoka*.
P. E.—*Pillar Edict of Aśoka*.
M. P. E.—*Minor Pillar Edict of Aśoka*.
Ind. Ant.—*Indian Antiquary*.
J. R. A. S.—*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.
J. B. O. R. S.—*Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*.
Jour. Ind. Hist.—*Journal of Indian History*.
Jour. U. P. Hist. Soc.—*Journal of the U. P. Historical Society*.
J. B. H. U.—*Journal of the Benares Hindu University*.
Jour. Dept. Lett.—*Journal of the Department of Letters*.
J. N. S. I.—*Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*.
J. A. S. B.—*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.
Mem. As. Soc. Beng.—*Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.
Proc. As. Soc. Beng.—*Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.
Proc. 1st. Or. Conf.—*Proceedings of the first Oriental Conference*.

- Rep. Arch. Surv. West. Ind.—Report
Arch. Survey of Western India.
- Arch. Surv. Ind., or A. S. I.—Archæological Survey of India.
- A. S. S. I.—Archæological Survey of India.
- Arch. Surv. Ann. Rep.—Archæological Survey of India Annual Report.
- Arch. Surv. Ind. Rep., or A. S. I. Rep.—Archæological Survey of India Report.
- Mem. Arch. Surv. Ind.—Memoirs of the Archæological Survey of India.
- Prog. Rep. A. S. W. C.—Progress Report of the Archæological Survey of Western India.
- Prog. Rep. Arch. Surv. Ind.—Progress Report of the Archæological Survey of India.
- Cam. Hist. Ind., or C. H. I.—Cambridge History of India, Vol. I (Rapson).
- Cam. Sh. Hist. Ind.—Cambridge Short History of India.
- E. H. I.—Early History of India.
- Ox. Hist. Ind.—Oxford History of India.
- E. H. D.—Early History of the Deccan (H. C. Raychaudhuri).
- Anc. Hist. Dec., or A. H. D.—Ancient History of the Deccan (J. Dubreuil).
- Pol. Hist. Anc. Ind.—Political History of Ancient India (H. C. Raychaudhuri).
- C. C. G. D.—Catalogue of the Dynasties of the Deccan (John Allan).
- Dy. Hist. North. Ind.—Dynastic History of North India (H. C. Ray).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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- Ancient India—M'Crindle, Ancient India as described in
Classical Literature.
G. B. I.—The Greeks in Bactria and India (W. W. Tarn).
Hc.—Harṣacarita.
Hc. C. T.—Harṣacarita (English Translation by Cowell
and Thomas).
G. O. S.—Gaekwāḍ Oriental Series.
Sachau—Alberuni's India (English Translation).
Watters—On Yuan Chwang's Travels.
Beal—Buddhist Records of the Western World.
Life—Life of Yuan Chwang (Samuel Beal).
Stein—English Translation of Kalhaṇa's Rājatarāṅgiṇī.
Elliot—History of India as told by its own Historians.
Briggs—History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power
(Tārikh-i-Firishta).

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PART I
CHAPTER I
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Sources

Absence of History

Ancient Indian literature, varied and rich in many respects, is singularly deficient in history. There is no work in all the literary treasures of the Brahmans, Buddhists and Jains comparable to the *Book of Kings* or the *Annals* of Livy or the *Histories* of Herodotus. This is not because India's past is barren of deeds worthy of remembrance. On the other hand, the ages were filled with heroic achievements, great upheavals and dynastic vicissitudes, but, strangely enough, these events did not find any systematic record with due regard to chronology. Whether this curious neglect of an important branch of literary activity was due to a lack of proper historical sense, or to the indifference of the religious orders, that controlled and developed the literatures, towards the fleeting mundane affairs of life, there is no gainsaying that the historian of ancient India suffers greatly from the initial difficulty of the want of genuine works of historiography.¹

2 LITERARY SOURCES—NON-HISTORICAL

The sources of early Indian history may be divided into two classes, historical and non-historical, which are either indigenous or foreign. We now first take up the former.

Literary sources

Non-Historical Works

The earliest literature of India is of a religious kind. The patience and industry of scholars have, however, succeeded in extracting from it useful bits of history. For instance, the *Rigveda*—have furnished us with a mass of historical information relating to the Aryans in India, their internal divisions, the "Dasyus" and other cognate tribes. The *Brāhmanas* (e.g., *Aitareya*, *Śaṅkhayana*), the *Upaniṣads*, like the *Bṛihadāranyaka*, as also the Buddhist *Piṭakas*, the *Jāyaka* and Jain canonical works (e.g., *Mahāvastu*, *Jyāna Sūtra*) incidentally embody historical facts that may be utilised with profit. The *Arthashastra* further demonstrated how such works as the *Gārgī-Samhitā*, an astronomical treatise, dramas of Kālidāsa and Bhāsa, the *Arthashastra*, illustrations of grammatical rules in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, or by Patañjali in the *Maṇu Smṛiti* afford us welcome light on dark corners of Indian history. But valuable and trustworthy as these sources are, they are far too meagre to supply the needs of a full history.

So-called Historical Literature

Epics—the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*—represent the first notable attempts of the ancient Hindus in this direction. No doubt, they give interesting pictures of the then religious and social conditions, but as chronicles of political events they seem lamentably full of tale-telling and chronological aberrations. Next come the *Purāṇas*, eighteen in number, which are said to have been recited by the *Sūta* Lomahaṛṣaṇa or his son (*Sauti*) Ugraśravas. Normally, they should deal with five set subjects, viz., (a) *Sarga* (primary creation), (b) *Pratisarga* (re-creation after periodical dissolution of the universe), (c) *Vamśa* (genealogies of gods and *Riṣis*), (d) *Manvantara* (groups of *mahāyuga* “great ages” in a *Kalpa* or æon, in each of which the first father of mankind was Manu), (e) *Vamśānucarita* (histories of old dynasties of kings). Of these, the last topic alone is important for the purpose of history, but it is found in the *Matsya*, *Vāyu*, *Viṣṇu*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Bhāgavata* and *Bhaviṣya* only out of the extant *Purāṇas*. Thus, most of these “collections of ‘old world’ legends” have got no historical value whatsoever. Even the rest contain much that is manifestly mythological and altogether confused from the chronological point of view.¹ They sometimes treat contemporaneous dynasties or rulers as successive, or omit some of them entirely (e.g., the *Purāṇas* are silent about the Kushans, Indo-Greeks Indo-Parthians, etc.). No dates are given, and even names of kings are not unoften inaccurate (cf. the list of Andhra kings). Notwithstanding these defects, the *Purāṇas* certainly transmit scraps of historical data, and it would not be fair to disparage their authority roundly. Among other early productions relevant

4 HISTORICAL (?) WORKS: FOREIGN WRITINGS

Harṣacarita, Sandhyākaranandi's *gupta's Navasāhasāṅkacarita*, *kadevacarita*, and Jayaratha's *Pratāp-rudra-carita* happily, however, these works are of little value on historical matter, and are more of a literary work full of elaboration, metaphor, and flourish, a work in Sanskrit, which can be of little approach to history, as we understand the *tarāṅgiṇī* of Kalhaṇa. It was begun in the 12th century, is based on writings of previous centuries, and on royal charters and laudatory inscriptions. The account of Kashmir for a few centuries preceding his time is quite reliable, but for the period he too is unfortunately deficient in details. In addition to these, we may consider the evidence of some southern Indian works (e.g., the *Nandikkalambam*, *Kulottuṅga-Pillai-tamiḻ*, Jayagondā's *Rājaraṣa-śōlan-Uḷā*, *Colavamaśa-carita*, Chinese chronicles, the *Dīpavamśa* (6th century) and the *Mahāvamśa* (6th century), and such Prakrit compositions as Vāṇī's *Pratāp-rudra-carita*, Hemacandra's *Kumārāpālacarita*; and all these require a cautious and critical use.

Foreign Writings

Not less valuable than the accounts of foreign writers or travellers, the knowledge of India was based either on a stay in the country for a short time or on the reports of men of several nationalities, Chinese, Tibetan, and Moslem.

and Roman works by Quintus Curtius, Diodoros Siculus, Arrian, Plutarch, and others; and the value of their testimony can best be judged from the fact that but for them we should have known nothing about the Macedonian invasion, so thoroughly have Indian writers maintained silence regarding this memorable episode. The *Indika* of Megasthenes, the Seleucid ambassador at the Maurya court, is another important source of information about the institutions, geography and products of India. It is now lost to us, but fragments are still preserved in the form of quotations by later authors, such as Arrian, Appian, Strabo, Justin, etc. Similarly, the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* and Ptolemy's *Geography* furnish geographical data of interest.

Like the classical (Greek and Roman) works, Chinese literature is also of great help in reconstructing ancient Indian history. There are numerous notices in it regarding the movements of the predatory Central Asian tribes that profoundly affected the destinies of India; and above all, we have the excellent narratives of Fa-hian (399-414 A. D.)¹, Yuan Chwang (629-45 A. D.)², and I-tsing (c. 673-95 A. D.)—three of the most distinguished pilgrims, who visited India in search of knowledge and with the desire to worship at the sites hallowed by the memory of the Buddha. Further, the works of the Tibetan Lāmā Tārānātha, the *Dulva* and *Tangyur*, etc. may also be profitably consulted.

Then come the Moslem authors, who inform us how step by step the armies of Islam conquered India and introduced another vigorous factor into Indian polity. The most celebrated of such writers was Alberuni, a man of versatile intellect and a scholar of

a mine of information on India. Earlier Moslem writers were *Silsilat-ut-Tawārikh*, and Al Ma. Among other Moslem works, we have Nizāmī's *Tāj-ul-Maāsir*, Mirkh Khond Mīr's *Habīb-us-Siyar*, Firis Nizāmuddin's *Tabaqāt-i-Akbari*, *Nasīri*, Al Utbi's *Tarīkh-i-Yamīn*, *Tārīkh-ul-Kāmil*.

The observations and writings are particularly valuable not only throw on the political events, sociology, and religion of ancient India, they establish synchronisms in the dates. Indeed, the identification of Candragupta Maurya has been in hands as the sheet-anchor of Indian

Archæological sources

Inscriptions

Where the literary sources are inscriptions fortunately come to thousands of them, the earliest of the fourth or fifth century B. C.¹ have perhaps a large number still to be spade. They are found engraved on stone tablets, metal plates, caves in the languages current at different times—Sanskrit, Pāli, mixed dialects in Southern India, *viz.*, Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese. Some of them are of great merit too, being either in prose

number are also incised in Kharoṣṭhī running, like Arabic and Persian, from right to left. Their decipherment, which is a marvel of scholarship, reveals that their object is to record a donation, public or private, or to commemorate a great event, or the exploits of a conqueror. The edicts of Aśoka, containing his ethical exhortations, are, of course, a class by themselves. The subject-matter of inscriptions is indeed very varied. There are even Sanskrit plays (e.g., at Dhār and Ajmer) and musical rules (e.g., at Kuḍimiyāmalai, Pudukotta State) recorded on stone. The importance of these documents can hardly be over-emphasised. They are extremely useful in fixing dates, and often regulate and supplement what we learn from literature and other sources. For instance, in the absence of such epigraphic evidence the veil of oblivion would hang heavily even on rulers like Khāravela or Samudragupta¹, and our knowledge of the mediæval Hindu dynasties would be altogether incomplete. Sometimes foreign inscriptions, too, unexpectedly lend us aid. Thus, the Boghaz-Koi (Asia Minor) inscriptions, which mention Vedic gods, probably testify to the movements of Aryan tribes. We have elsewhere referred to the contact of India with ancient Iran, and curiously it is confirmed by inscriptions discovered at Persepolis and Naksh-i-Rustam². Similarly, inscriptions throw a flood of light on the political and cultural relations between India and the Far East in early times.

Coins

The next guides, we may appeal to, are coins.

derived from literature, it. They are of various or alloy, and contain legends with dates are doubtless work of Indian chronologists. anonymous ones yield fully consider their fabric our sole evidence with and Indo-Baktrian kind completely ignored the Coins shed remarkable *ganas* (autonomous communities) and also on the religious monarchs (e.g., of Kanishka) accomplishments (e.g., of the metal undoubtedly of the time, and helps us in fixing the line. latter must be applied. discovery of Roman coins in means indicate an extensive political influence in India. lament of Pliny over the country in exchange for etc.

Monuments

Last, but not the least are not directly concerned

at Boro-Bodur and Prambanam (central Java), as also the remarkable ruins at Angkor Vāt and Angkor Thom (Kambuja), reveal the hand of Indians, and show that they had migrated to the Far East and spread their power and culture there.¹ Even for purposes of chronology, the evidence of monuments cannot be entirely despised, for experts have demonstrated how important conclusions follow a close study of the stratification of buildings. Further, it may not be out of place to add here that sculptures and paintings (e.g., at Ajantā) occasionally illumine our path where we might otherwise have walked with faltering steps.

Conclusion or Main Features

Such, in brief,² are the sources for the resuscitation of India's early past. The most striking feature, when compared with modern history, is the meagreness of our materials and the wide range over which they lie scattered. Accordingly, the historian must work like a miner with the pick and shovel of his perseverance and critical judgment to get at the gold of facts without the dross of courtly exaggerations and poetic embellishments. Quite often rocks intervene in the shape of conflicting claims, utter absence of dates, or prevalence of several eras at different periods and places,³

¹ See Dr. R. C. Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, Vol. I, Champa; *Suvarnadvīpa*; and publications of the Greater India Society; Dr. B. R. Chatterji, *Indian Cultural Influence in Cambodia* (Calcutta, 1928); *India and Java* (Calcutta, 1922); H. G.